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ABSTRACT

Four deaf-blind students at the Massachusetts Association for the Blind were involved in a pilot aerobic program consisting of jogging for 15-20 minutes three times a week. Students were chosen based on their enjoyment of this fast movement and they were given clearance for this activity by both a doctor and a physical therapist. The students' pulse rates were taken periodically to determine whether their cardiovascular systems were benefiting from this activity. After the jogging was completed, the students walked back to class where they were given orange juice both as a reward and as a fluid replacement. Many positive changes were seen in these students. This was an excellent opportunity for students to release energy and frustrations with an appropriate activity. The four students displayed a decrease of self-abuse and self-stimulatory behaviors. The physical changes that were made consisted of a lowered resting pulse rate indicating that the cardiovascular system had to work less hard and was operating more efficiently. Since the staff noticed this positive development, more support and assistance were given and requests were made to have more students participate in this activity. Plans were made for expanding the program to incorporate walking, swimming, and mini-trampoline jumping. (EM)

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JOGGING PROGRAM FOR DEAF-BLIND STUDENTS

IMPROVES CONDITION AND REDUCES SELF-STIMULATION

by Lisa D. Alajajian, Adaptive Physical Education Teacher
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Four of the deaf-blind students at the Massachusetts Association for the Blind have been involved in a pilot aerobics program for the past six months. The Deaf-Blind Program at MAB serves 26 multihandicapped adolescents who are legally blind, aurally impaired, developmentally disabled and nonverbal. Besides receiving instruction in daily living skills, communication, and prevocational skills, the students receive adaptive physical education which offers swimming instruction and individual gross motor programs.

Gretchen Von Mering, a graduate student from Boston University in Exercise Physiology, and a volunteer with the MAB gross motor program, suggested that an aerobics program be included as the cardiovascular component of the program. She wanted to study the effects of running on the students and proposed an aerobics jogging program.

Six students were chosen to participate in the pilot jogging project based upon their enjoyment of this fast movement. The students were given physicals and cleared by a doctor. The physical therapist also checked them to insure that the students had no structural problems limiting their functioning. An in-service for staff was held to explain the plan, purposes and methodology and to obtain as much staff support and assistance as possible.

The students jogged around the block in front of MAB for 15-20 minutes three times a week. In order to see any beneficial effect on the cardiovascular system's operation, this consistency was necessary. We projected the students' "target zone." This is the most beneficial range of heart beats per minute for 20 minutes of cardiovascular exercise. This is computed by using a standard formula of 220 minus the age of the student, then taking 70% to 85% of that figure. This result is the range of heart beats per minute we aim for and monitor as they run so we know that they are receiving the right amount of work out for their system. We record their pulse rates every two minutes, after every .2 mile.

We begin by signing to the children, "It is time to go out running," and we take their resting pulse rate. We do four warm-up stretching exercises with them - a hamstring stretch, heel chord stretch, sidebends and quadracep stretches. We walk with them for several hundred yards to ease into the exercise and then take a warm-up pulse.

We jog with them as a sighted guide to keep them moving for the one-half to one mile run. When we stop to take pulse rates, we are sure to sign, "good running". After the student runs three to five laps, we walk back to class for two to five minutes to allow the body to return to its normal resting pulse rate. We take a post warm-up pulse to note how long it takes for the heart rate to return to that rate. The students are then given a drink of orange juice both as a reward and as a replacement for lost fluids.

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During the past six months, we have seen many positive changes in these students. Running has become part of their weekly routines. They anticipate their running now, often signing for it during the day.

This has been an excellent opportunity for the students to release energy and frustrations with an appropriate activity. They enjoy the time outside. Running requires continuous movement, reinforcing a longer attendance to activity. The four students display a decrease of self-abuse and self-stimulatory behaviors which we feel indicates that the activity provides adequate stimulation. We have also noted less aggressive outbursts, better

sleeping patterns, improved appetites and more compliance with daily tasks.

Besides seeing positive changes in behavior, we have noticed some important physical changes. The resting pulses have become lower. This indicates that the cardiovascular system has to work less hard and is operating more efficiently. We have also noticed that the post warm-up pulses have dropped sooner after the activity. This also indicates greater body efficiency.

Since staff have noticed these positive developments in the students, we have received more support, assistance and requests for more students to participate in the program. We hope to expand the program to incorporate walking, swimming and minitrampoline jumping so that more students can participate in an aerobics program during the winter months.

The New Balance Factory Outlet donated several pairs of jogging shoes that made running more injoyable for the students. We hope to receive more "sighted guides" from volunteer students who are interested in assisting with this project. We feel that once the students' bodies are functioning more efficiently and effectively they will feel better, work better and be happier.

Anyone who wants more information or is interested in assisting with the program, please contact Lisa D. Alajajian at the Massachusetts Association for the Blind in Brookline at 738-5110.